THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

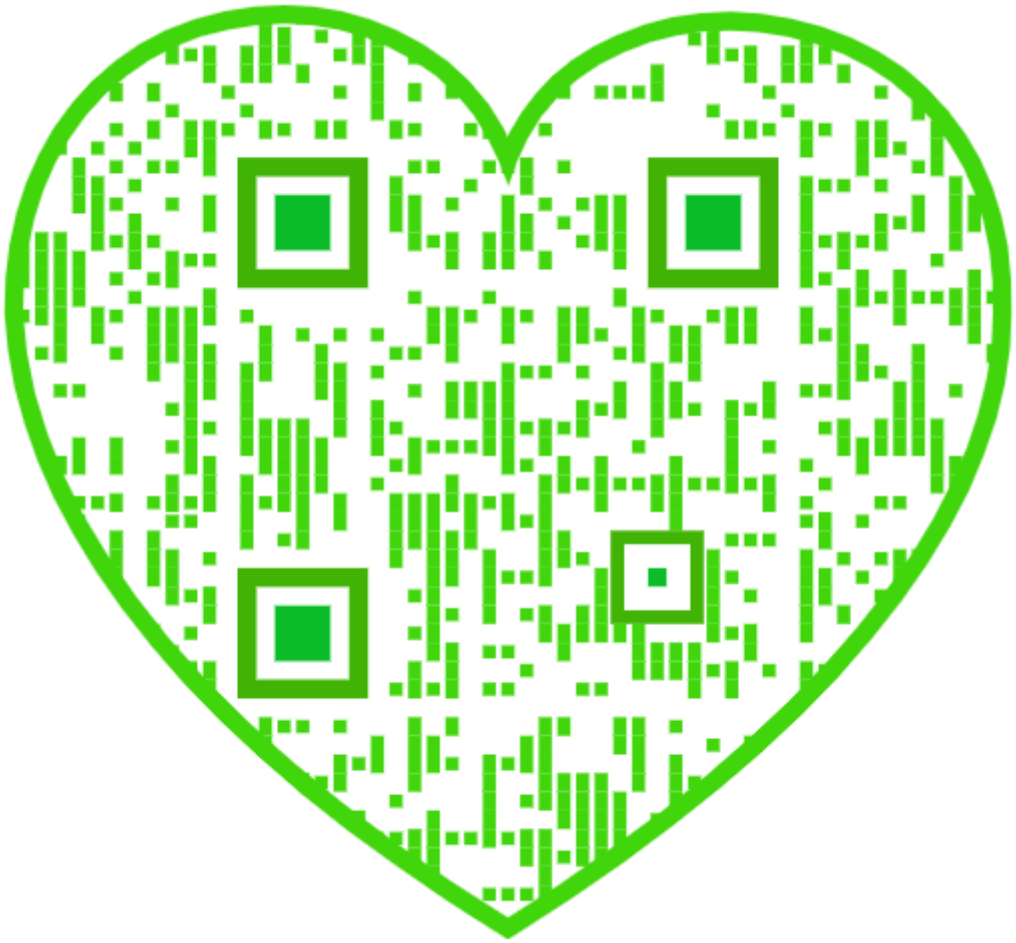
LB
1573
.W17

Author

Title

Imprint

16—47372-2



The Essentials of Method

IN

Teaching Children to Read

BY

JOSEPH H. WADE, A.M., Ph.D.

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO:
BENZIGER BROTHERS,
Publishers of Benziger's Magazine

THE

ESSENTIALS OF METHOD

IN

TEACHING CHILDREN TO READ

BY

JOSEPH H. WADE, A.M., PH.D.

NEW YORK CINCINNATI CHICAGO

BENZIGER BROTHERS

Publishers of Benziger's Magazine

1912

LB1573
.W17

THIS monograph contains the underlying principles and the practical methods and devices in teaching children to read which have been presented by the writer in lectures and conferences given at various times to the following groups of students and teachers in New York City:—

The principals and teachers of the Public and Corporate Schools of School Districts 1, 9, 10, and 11, the Extension Classes in the College of the City of New York, the Class in Pedagogy of St. Francis Xavier's College, the Sisters of Charity at the Catholic Orphan Asylum, the Sisters of Mercy at the Institution of Mercy, the Ursuline Sisters in the Convent of St. Ursula, the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the Franciscan Sisters of St. Anthony's School.

Copyright, 1912, by BENZIGER BROTHERS

©Cl.A315981
701

THE ESSENTIALS OF METHOD IN TEACHING CHILDREN TO READ

READING may be considered as the foundation of all our school work. If this foundation is not strong and lasting the education that is built thereon is necessarily weak and shifting. Occasionally we hear reading described as a getting of thought from the printed page, and everything is labelled reading that involves the sounding of words without much reference to the comprehension of the content, or the amount of mental activity involved. The fact is, however, that reading is not getting thought from the printed page for the very good reason that there is no thought thereon. There are symbols, words, which may or may not arouse mental activity or interest in the pupil, as his mind possesses or does not possess the ideas represented by such words and symbols. This essential truth must be fully appreciated by the teacher of reading who would make her work successful with children of the first school years.

Teachers who have had successful experience in the work realize that primary reading presents one of the most difficult problems for solution in the whole range of teaching. More time and thought have been devoted to this feature of school work by practical and theoretical educators than to any other subject in the curriculum, and, as a natural result,

we have methods and devices *ad nauseam.* With almost every new series of readers, some novel and only way of teaching children to read is advertised and heralded as the best, though a close examination of the content and method of many of these readers often disclose little of real novelty in the series beyond its name.

Occasionally golden promises are made by the heralds of a new series to teach all children to read fluently in two or three years, and this marvel is seemingly accomplished when half of the entire school time is given to the work. The same marvellous result might be accomplished in teaching children to read a foreign language, if an equally large proportion of the time was devoted to the subject, to the practical exclusion of other important subjects of the curriculum. Unfortunately the real aim of the reading work is frequently neglected in the effort to cover a great amount of material. This real aim is the training of children to think and to express their thoughts in language clear and appropriate. The most successful methods, those that have lived and will continue to live because of real intrinsic merit, recognize the great truth that it is preferable to make haste slowly in the first years, than to attempt to cover an extensive field by artificial methods.

It is not the quantity of reading in the first years that counts; rather it is the assimilation and mind training that should ever be kept in view. The successful teacher recognizes this fact and aims to keep the word-study an interesting and profitable exercise, instead of hurrying through the pages of a book. With such teachers the ability to read is acquired by their pupils as a natural result of a real interest in the content of the reading material.

We occasionally hear of the amount of reading accomplished by the seven and eight year old child, as if that were the *summum bonum,* but such statements give us no idea of the amount of content the children have assimilated or made

practical use of in their growing vocabulary. In this connection it is well for the teacher to appreciate the fact that a child's reading vocabulary cannot be increased by twenty or thirty new words every week. If, as Professor Palmer states in his "Self Cultivation in English," the educated adult should aim constantly to add two new words a week to his working vocabulary, how important is it that we should not over-reach ourselves in training children to read by adding an excessive number of new words in the first two years of the course.

There is one criterion of the quality as well as of the quantity of reading words to be taught in the first years which has stood the test of ages, and this in the words of Professor McMurry, is "to adapt the printed words and sentences, the reading material, to the child's experiences and activities. The closer this relationship the more rapidly will the child master a substantial knowledge of word form."

This is one reason why classics for children's reading should be real children's classics; otherwise a true appreciation of the content will never be acquired. Many pupils seemingly progress rapidly in reading such classics, who in reality remain ignorant of the story content. A remarkable instance of this too prevalent mistake is given by Dr. Shields in his "Making and Unmaking of a Dullard." He describes how, in attempting to force upon him reading beyond his powers of comprehension, the teacher merely succeeded in creating a hopeless confusion in his child mind, in humiliating him before his classmates and finally in driving him from the school labelled an impossible dullard. It was not until he was approaching young manhood that Dr. Shields ever acquired confidence in his ability to understand and assimilate the content of the school reader. This mistake may be expected whenever we confront the child with reading selections which, though classic, are foreign to his experiences and to his powers of constructive

imagination, and far beyond the limitation of his vocabulary. Especially is this the case, even with the simplest children's classics, whenever teachers attempt to present the reading lesson without bringing to their pupils in an interesting manner the realization of the content of the literature to be read. On two features of the work rests the success of the reading lesson. First, reading lessons with a vocabulary suitable to the child's mind, expressing a content that can be readily appreciated, and second, the teacher's explanation, interesting and clear to the children with the fullest opportunity afforded for silent reading and appreciation. If these two essentials were observed by authors of school readers and by teachers, we would have no such experiences as come to all who carefully examine into the reading results in the first year of school. It is on these features of the work that City Superintendent Maxwell, in a recent conference, laid the greatest stress. Speaking of the intellectual habits that should be developed through the teaching of reading, he grouped them as follows:

1. The habit of taking in as much of a line or sentence in a single glance as possible, and then speaking it aloud with proper expression.

2. The habit of making out the pronunciation of unfamiliar words from the sounds of single letters and phonograms.

3. The habit of getting the meaning of what is read.

4. Expressing that meaning so that it would be understood and appreciated by others.

5. Getting the meaning of words.

6. Analyzing the matter read into its different topics and grouping details around them.

If teachers would only build their work on such simple but strong foundations many of the failures in reading, not only of the first few years, but of the entire school course, would be eliminated.

On the contrary we frequently find mistakes in method

which a little real knowledge of the processes of development of the child mind would eliminate. Thus, we find a teacher assuming that her pupils understand and assimilate the content of lessons that deal with experiences foreign to the child's life and environment. Sometimes children will read such lessons with fluency, but a few well chosen questions at the conclusion of the lesson, especially if the questions are asked by a casual visitor instead of by the class teacher, will disclose the fact that the pupils had read only words without meaning to them.

Such a reading lesson is a failure, no matter how fluently the words and sentences are recited by the pupils. Such a lesson is sometimes a mere memory exercise on a story repeated or read in varying form by teacher or pupils until the interest is deadened. A teacher should be quick to notice when the interest begins to lag. If the story is a good one, if the content is rich in that which interests the child, the first reading will hold the attention of the class; but when the same story is repeated in slightly varying form, sometimes for several days, the teacher is only feeding her pupils with dead sea fruit. They are not being quickened to thought and the words lose their life and vividness.

If teachers wish to assure themselves that the pupils of the first or second years really recognize the words of the lesson, let these words be written on the board in a transposed order, then by means of the pointer the teacher can form new sentences from the words. If the children read the sentences thus formed, then the teacher can feel assured that the words of the lesson are really known. I recall listening to a lesson which was read so fluently that I was amazed that first year children could master the varied and rather difficult vocabulary of the story. When the lesson was half completed, however, I asked the children to close their books and called for volunteers to continue the lesson from memory. A majority of the

pupils raised their hands, and several children called upon repeated word for word the story to the end, and yet the teacher had stated the lesson was new. I discovered that the method of teaching this lesson had been for the teacher to read the story over and over until the children knew the words, phrases, and sentences by heart.

I recall another experience with first year children. The reading lesson was a story continuing for several pages. Many of the images and ideas expressed were beyond the power of the children to assimilate or appreciate, and each page averaged probably half a dozen new words. Pupils read on with seeming fluency, but the absence of a close study of the lesson seemed to indicate that the exercise was more a memory recitation than a reading lesson. At my request the teacher wrote the first thirty words of the lesson on the board in an order different from that observed in the story. The pupils were then asked to volunteer to read the words from the board, and, of the first five selected by the teacher, every one read the words, not as they were written on the board, but as they appeared in the story in the book. Then when certain words from the board were combined into short sentences not found in the reading lesson, scarcely a pupil in the class could read the sentences. This showed conclusively that there was very little word recognition, that the teacher was mistaking memorization for reading, and that the recitation was the result of a cumulative repetition of the story, with little or no understanding of the content. Yet the teacher of the class had probably given more time and labor to the work than nine out of ten teachers of reading give in the ordinary program. I speak of these instances, because, with the interesting content usually found in good classic stories for children, the teacher who observes the right method will succeed in obtaining real and effective word recognition at the same time that she arouses the right kind of interest in the lessons. Such failures

are due, as Superintendent Hughes says in his admirable little book, "Teaching to Read," to the mistaken idea held by some teachers and some educators that the aim should be to train pupils to read aloud, instead of teaching them to read, and this mistake is also pointed out by Sarah Louise Arnold and Professor Huey. Such teaching either utterly neglects, or at best minimizes, in the first year silent reading as an efficient aid to good oral reading. As a result of this neglect the child in the latter years of the course is unable to grasp the content, not only of the literature placed before him, but of the supplementary reading in history and geography.

From the very inception of the child's schooling through the entire course, the essential purpose of the work in reading falls under the following headings:

1. Teaching the pupils to master the mechanics of reading as rapidly and as naturally as possible.

2. Leading them to an appreciation of what is meant by real reading instead of the mere calling off of words.

3. Training them so that reading becomes a source of intellectual profit and pleasure.

4. As the highest aim, the development of a love for good literature, by inspiring the right kind of interest in the literature that is best adapted to their years.

Though we may all agree that the above undoubtedly mark the essential aims in the work, the young teacher is often dismayed by the diverse and numerous methods of teaching primary reading, each one of which is proclaimed as the only correct way. The fact is, as Stanley Hall states, "there is no one and only orthodox way of teaching and learning this greatest and hardest of all arts." Above all it should be borne in mind that the stated use of any one method does not preclude the incidental use of any, and perhaps of all others." Such words must come as a benediction to those practical teachers who are weary of the claims of advocates of this or

that so-called system of reading advertised as the latest and surest method. The teacher of successful experience who is looking for real and permanent results knows that many so-called new methods are not new at all. Occasionally we have some new application of an old method, but to the class teacher it is indifferent whether this or that method is advertised as the newest, but it is important that the results obtained be real and permanent.

In this chaos of conflicting claims the one great truth is often lost sight of, viz: that it is the *teacher,* and *not* the *method,* that counts for success or failure in the work. A teacher who does not see the real purpose of the reading lesson, who aims to cover so many pages per week by means of some method or device that she does not clearly grasp, is not attaining a real success. But the teacher who understands the purpose and foresees the end, who uses the method, be it phonic, word or sentence, with intelligence and judgment, must succeed. This is one of the principles of pedagogy that has stood and will stand for all time; that it is the *teacher,* and not the *book* or *method,* that counts for success. To-day no one presumes to speak in praise of the old alphabet method, yet the great majority of teachers of the present day were probably taught to read by this obsolete method. In fact, with all our experimenting on first and second year children with this or that new method, it is doubtful whether our graduates of to-day read with any more appreciation, if as much, as did the graduates of thirty years ago. A few years ago a principal visited a school which had been recommended to him as one in which excellent reading could be observed. In many of the classes the reading was excellent in enunciation and pronunciation, and fluent in delivery. Then the visitor asked permission to question the children on their reading, and the test was made in an 8 B class. The pupils had read with marked expression Hawthorne's "Great Stone Face," but when the books were

closed and they were asked what the story meant to them, the theme of the classic, not a single pupil in the class could be induced to speak. The reading had been, to a great extent, merely a sounding of words, and yet the question asked should not have been a difficult one for children of the highest grade to answer. In fact, a true reading of the lesson would have prepared the children for just such questioning. Long before the renaissance of literature reading in our schools pupils who had entered the preparatory class of the City College and the lowest grade of the Normal College were asked just such questions by the English tutors. I have papers at hand which show that such knowledge was required from pupils who had entered from the public schools after a seven-year course. Certainly with our eight-year course we ought to cover at least a year's work beyond what was accomplished in the past. In many schools in New York City this is accomplished, and it is because of the excellence and thoroughness of the teacher's work. The problem in elementary education still remains the great problem that President Butler sees in higher education, "To find the teacher"—not to prove the method at hand the only way.

While the influence of a teacher counts most seriously in the first years of school, the habit of reading with thought and attention which is inculcated at the beginning must continue and develop through the course. The two distinct phases of reading which must be considered are:

1. Learning to read—the work of the first three or four years of school. In this work stress is laid upon the so-called mechanics of reading, enunciation, pronunciation, articulation, expression, emphasis, etc. Success here depends upon the interest of the presentation and the thoroughness of the drill.

2. Reading to acquire knowledge and to appreciate literature. This is the work of the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth years, and its success or failure depends on the foundation

that has been laid in the first years, the reading material that is presented to the pupil, and the teacher's ability to awaken interest in good literature.

In the first phase of the work the good teacher aims to train the child to master the written or printed symbols of the words as quickly as possible.

The pupils come to school with a speaking vocabulary ranging from four hundred to six hundred words, according to their home environment. The teacher's task is mainly to lead her pupils to recognize the symbols of the ideas they possess —she is gradually converting many of the words of their speaking vocabulary into a reading vocabulary. When the children come from homes where a foreign language is spoken and from street associations where a *patois* is commonly used, the teacher's task is very difficult. With such pupils she must build up both a speaking and a reading vocabulary, but, though more difficult, the work with such pupils is along the same general lines followed in teaching children of English-speaking parents to read. There must be a greater stress on the phonic drills and exercises with the foreign pupils, but the word method and the sentence method are equally essential in developing the understanding of the content and in training to correct forms of expression with English-speaking as well as with foreign children.

Before taking up in detail the essential features in teaching reading to the pupils of the first years, it is well to recognize that the order of development is as follows:

1. The idea or object should precede the word and its symbol.

2. The verb as the soul of a sentence is of first importance.

3. Talking and reading by the child are generally more useful than talking and reading by the teacher.

4. That, as the pupil is trained in his first reading by imitation, it is imperative that the teacher should speak clearly

and distinctly so as to present a uniformly correct model to her class.

These are the simple principles that guide the efficient teacher in her preparation and presentation of the reading lesson, and divorced from the technicalities and involved ratiocinations of a pedagogy that sometimes merely befogs the mind, or serves as an empty symbol for examination purposes, these principles outline good method in reading. If the pupil always understood and assimilated what he read, if correct models of enunciation and pronunciation were always presented by the teacher, if when a pupil read orally he was compelled to read so that all could hear and follow him without straining, how rapid would be the real progress in this subject. Accepting these principles as the fundamentals of successful work, the next step is to consider the other essentials of method in teaching reading to primary pupils. These essentials are:

1. Teaching or developing the new words that appear in each lesson.

2. Drilling on these new words, and on especially selected review words that appear in the lesson, so as to obtain ready recognition.

3. Phonic work. Drills in enunciation, pronunciation, articulation, and blend work—very important.

4. The reading of the lesson by the pupils under careful supervision of the teacher, insisting on a natural expression, and training the children to read as if they meant to tell something to their hearers. Stumbling and halting delivery never should be accepted. In this feature of the work the dramatization of certain stories and poems gives effective aid to the development of correct expression, and serves to eliminate the lifeless calling of words which is sometimes labelled "reading."

These are the essentials which every authority on reading insists upon, though they are expressed occasionally in different

phraseology. Thus Professor Barrett in his "Practical Pedagogy" speaks of the essentials as word mastery, sight reading, or recognizing and calling at sight short sentences as wholes, getting the words from the printed page, and interpreting or oral expression of the content. Professor White described them as:

1. Recognition at sight of the printed or written words.
2. A knowledge of their meaning and use.
3. Oral reading or training to correct and facile utterance.

No pupil should be asked to read a lesson until the new words have been explained, developed, and mastered. Though this work may seem to delay the completion of the lesson, no teacher who realizes that quality rather than quantity leads naturally and quickly to clear appreciation and correct expression, will ever consider this task as a useless expenditure of time. In this feature of her work the teacher is basing her method on the fact that reading is a process of thinking. As Miss Laing, in her excellent exposition of methods in reading, points out, "Conducting a reading lesson is conducting, drilling, shaping, helping forward a process of thinking that is going on in the mind of each individual in the class." The teacher's success depends upon her careful study of the child's capabilities to understand, and her intelligent assistance by question and explanation, or by illustration of the meaning. It is easy to appreciate, therefore, the fact that the true method will be a combination of the word, sentence, and phonic methods, developing that power side by side with ability to express the content.

While the phonic work in these first years familiarizes the children quickly and thoroughly with the elemental sounds, the teacher should avoid the purely artificial and mechanical in her phonic drills and exercises. Such mechanical work may count for something in the training for clear enunciation and distinct articulation, but it means nothing in developing the

thought power of the child, and this should go side by side with the other phases of the work. Some of the reasons given by Professor Hughes for insisting upon the importance of intelligent phonic work are, that such work develops the pupil's self-activity from the very beginning of his reading, awakens the child's interest by operations of a constructive character, co-ordinates the reading, spelling, and composition more naturally and logically than any other method, and trains to correct forms of enunciation, pronunciation, and articulation.

Incidentally it may be noted that the excessive use of diacritical marks should be avoided as they tend to make the word form more complex, therefore, more difficult to recognize easily and readily. The recent report of the Committee of the National Education Association, which has been working on this problem for some time, will probably have a very vital influence on this question of diacritical marking. The Committee consisted of City Superintendent Maxwell, Dean Balliet of the New York University of the School of Pedagogy, Dr. Vaile of Oak Park, Illinois, President Seely of the State Teachers' College, Iowa, and Melville Dewey of New York State. This committee in aiming to make pronunciation less difficult for the children in the schools has recommended that all but one of the diacritical marks, which have been proven stumbling blocks for our beginners, shall be eliminated. Of course, a reform recommended by such powerful names in the world of pedagogy will be eventually accomplished, but it will take time, for diacritical marking has been the rule to a very large extent in the construction of phonic readers. Personally, I have observed lessons where the teachers handled the diacritical marking so skillfully that the words and sentences written on the blackboard, and so marked, were really of great assistance in training to correct pronunciation. But, again, this depends on the ability of the teacher, not on the excellence of a mechanical aid.

In the initial phonic exercises and drills the appeal should be to the ear without reference to the printed or written form. Later these sounds will be represented by their respective letters or symbols. While it is necessary to emphasize the sound element in the first year reading, it is a mistake to cultivate an unnatural tone quality. As pupils begin to read combinations of sounds as words and sentences, it is not advisable to halt them at every error of enunciation, less the children acquire the habit of attending mainly to the sounds to the exclusion of the idea or the thought which the words and sentences express.

It is because of a mistaken ideal of the aim of their work that teachers frequently are lead to place oral reading as the only reading to be taught. On the contrary, as Miss Laing succinctly puts it, reading is the grasp of thought through the written characters, and the teacher must guard against accepting as reading mere word pronunciation, no matter how fluently expressed. This can be achieved through the proper use of the question and by frequent oral reproduction as free as the vocabulary of the child and the completeness of the story will permit.

This may seem slow work, difficult to succeed in, but it is a training which with experience will be more fruitful of results than almost any other feature of school work. The child who learns to read by a method which develops his thought power, even though the amount covered be limited in quantity, will in future years be able with his own efforts to think into the content of the supplementary reading, and to grasp the meaning of the text in his history and geography text books, instead of leaning, as is so often the case, on the teacher or other pupils for guidance and explanation. He is getting the most valuable training that the first year of his school life can give. He is forming habits of listening with attentive ear, and reading with appreciation of the meaning. He is acquiring a ready

recognition of the forms of the words he is asked to read, words that suggest ideas, familiar and interesting to him. The desire to read grows because the child finds pleasure in the occupation, for, when properly taught and practised in the class or at home, reading is not work. But the young teacher may properly ask, " How can I secure this happy condition? " The answer is, from the very beginning train pupils to read silently as an aid to grasping content. Make the silent reading an active agent in training to correct oral reading. But the teacher may say that she has not time to wait for the appreciation of the content, for this silent reading, that she must finish so many pages in a week, or that she must complete in one or two lessons some long fairy myth or children's classic. In such cases it is indeed hard to expect results, which without the show or glitter are much more substantial and lasting.

But with reading matter that in the first years consists of short simple sentences, well graded and logically connected, full of interesting content, real progress is assured by using the so-called thought method. Such reading gives sufficient repetition to impress the word pictures and makes use of lessons whose content deals with experiences, activities, and environments familiar to the child.

This is the kind of reading matter that Professor McMurry advocates when he says, " The more closely the written or printed words are related to the child's activities, or the more dependent those activities are upon the knowledge of word form, the quicker and more natural will be their mastery."

On this point Professor M. V. O'Shea, in a recent article in *Science* on " Popular Misconception Concerning Precocity in Children," takes a very decided stand against false ideals in teaching children to read classics beyond their powers of comprehension and assimilation. He states that while some children seem to be able at a very early age to read the works

of profound thinkers, such children have simply gained a certain degree of familiarity with a peculiar kind of visual object, which is an extremely mechanical sort of thing to do, requiring no very high degree of mentality.

"One may be able to recognize words so as to be able to pronounce them, while one's experience is far from giving one the key to their contents, and thus enabling one to read in the true sense of the word. It is a simple matter of psychology that reading for content, instead of simply for verbal recognition, cannot go far beyond the individual's experience."

With short sentences, or as they are called in the first years, stories, the child is trained to grasp the story as a whole. The words are either familiar by association or the teacher has made them plain and clear by explanation; therefore there should be no halting delivery in the reading of the story. It is because of this training to grasp the whole sentence that this method has been called the sentence method. It is because it trains the pupils to study content and to think, that it is called the thought method, but by whatever name it is called, when combined with sensible and systematic phonic drills, it is undoubtedly the most effective in results, and we can understand why Dr. Maxwell placed this habit of taking in as much of a line or sentence in a single glance as possible, as the first of the habits he recommended in connection with the teaching and learning to read.

It does not require special manuals or technical training to make successful teaching when such simple and sometimes so-called old-fashioned methods are advocated. There is nothing mysterious or bizarre in their application, and a good teacher will get good results by devoting to the work of reading only the regular time allowed in the course.

Probably there is nothing more disappointing to the teacher who is really striving for success than to have pupils stand and read as if every word was being pulled into the lesson

by the forelock. And yet the cause in nearly all instances of halting delivery is the teacher's neglect of careful explanation combined with a desire to cover a certain ground within a limited time. The child is no more to be blamed than would be the adult for such reading, if the latter did not understand what he was trying to express and the words were unfamiliar to him. Professor O'Shea very aptly says on this point, "Try any adult in reading a passage in which the words are quite unfamiliar, so that he has to give attention to each one separately, and you will find he does not read with any more expression than some children in your room, who seem to you rather stupid and lifeless."

In order to make the pupils familiar with the content the first necessity is careful preparation for each lesson by the teacher. It is the questioning of the teacher that awakens the thought and curiosity of the child. It is the questioning of the child that often displays his interest in the content. With children of the first years in the school, teachers should follow different methods of questioning. For instance, the questions of the teacher may be written on the board, and the answers given orally by the children, or the oral questions of the children may be answered in sentences written on the board. The questioning must be on the content of the lesson so that the child may be trained to grasp the thought, and the language used, especially in the written answers, must be in words familiar to the pupils. This questioning in the preparation and later in the review can be utilized for various practical purposes. The good teacher can train children to correct forms of expression and emphasis by taking some one sentence in the lesson and emphasizing in turn each one of the important words in the story. For instance, the sentence, "This little fairy is very *beautiful.*" *This* little fairy is very beautiful. This little fairy is *very* beautiful. This *little* fairy is very beautiful.

All of these elements in the work of word mastery, phonics, exercises to cultivate the proper emphasis, etc., while important, must be considered merely as means to an end, and therefore must occupy a place relatively subordinate in the field. The efficiency of this work is proved when it has been so thoroughly performed that the child unconsciously makes use of the mechanics as an aid in reading while he devotes his attention and thought mainly to the content of the lesson.

The establishment of a proper relation between form and content should be an aim of every teacher. Unfortunately present methods often emphasize one or the other. The author of a reader, as well as the teacher, must discern not only what is most interesting to the child now, but also that which will count most in his future training.

If pleasurable interest, or mere amusement is to be our only guide in selecting reading material, it is a simple matter to supply a child with unlimited nursery rhymes and fairy stories. Children prefer this reading matter, but it would be a mistake to limit reading content to this material, for the learning of any art cannot be merely a pleasant wandering down a shady lane. Education is labor as well as play, and though the so-called soft pedagogy seems at times the easiest way, the final results of such training are often found to be superficial and transitory. As Miss Arnold says, we may begin with that which appeals with greatest interest to their child life, but we must not confine ourselves to this. Children must be led to a fuller enjoyment and a wider interest, by always offering something more than that which merely satisfies their desire for enjoyment.

The ideal content aims to make the reading lesson a thinking lesson. The teacher must lead the pupil to a desire to express the thoughts of the writer, and when he is thus trained the child will carry the power beyond the limits of his formal

reading to the supplementary reading, and to the home study of the text books.

This training to interpret the content of the lesson in the child's own language should be one of the chief duties of the teacher in the primary grades. She can give this training by asking questions which in their sequence cover a topical outline of the lesson; the pupils in their answers using the language of the book in conjunction with their own growing vocabulary. This exercise develops the thought power of pupils by compelling them to read the content attentively, and at the same time it develops careful habits of expression. This work will relieve the monotonous oral reading in the earliest years. In fact, those who have studied the subject of reading closely know that there is too much oral reading in the first, second, and third years of the course, and not nearly enough in the sixth, seventh, and eighth years. Even with the formal readers, which are mainly made up of interesting story content, children are required to read orally lesson after lesson, with little or no opportunity for silent reading, assimilation of the content, or free lively reproduction. Such teaching virtually ignores the content side and attends entirely to the formal oral reading.

The measure of success in such teaching is often found in the answer to the question, how well can my pupils read aloud? Seldom is the question asked, how much do they understand of their reading? It is the just balance of oral and silent reading that attains really successful results. As good oral reading must be based on careful training in enunciation, pronunciation, and articulation, so the silent reading must be based on the understanding of the content. As the dramatic element in reading must be utilized to develop expression, so the study of the meaning of the story and its moral, if there be a moral, must be used to make silent reading an effective exercise. A real teacher knows that her pupils are able to read expressively

as soon as they grasp short phrases or sentences as wholes. Professor O'Shea calls this power "the very first step in the attainment of good expression in reading, as indeed it is the first step in the mastery of reading, from the standpoint of appreciation of content." Here again it is well to emphasize the importance of phonic work, because though understanding of the content, proper use of dramatization, grasping of sentences as units, all count for expressive reading, unless the pupils are carefully trained to a clear enunciation and a distinct articulation, the oral reading will count for little in the training of the child.

During the first two years the reading lessons present simple words which by their recurrence become familiar to the pupils. Some of these words through their phonic similarities may be grouped together, and these become the stock words which the pupils use constantly in their drills and exercises. Occasionally these stock words can be taught objectively, others are taught through use in familiar context, and the teacher can make frequent and effective use of the association of ideas in the teaching of these words.

The definite results obtained from the use of phonetic methods are especially satisfactory. By combining phonic elements new words are formed, but these words should be words of meaning to the child. They should fit into the pupil's life and experience. They should be words which the child will find useful in his rapidly developing speaking and reading vocabulary.

It is a mistake to attempt to teach by any method twenty or thirty new words to a second or third year class, and young teachers sometimes attempt this impossible feat by drilling on the use of phonic similarities in preparation for a reading lesson. The pupils may pronounce them correctly, they may even recognize and read them, but they cannot grasp their meaning, they cannot use them understandingly, and such

words disappear from the knowledge of the child as rapidly as they were seemingly acquired. The question the teacher should ask in connection with this phase of the work is, do these words represent objects or ideas which the children know or can apperceive. If the question is answered negatively, the teacher, if she is compelled to teach such words in preparation for a reading lesson, has a task well nigh impossible to finish satisfactorily.

While every letter or character that represents a sound is a phonogram in the stricter sense, we generally apply the term to those combinations of letters which are used in building up a considerable portion of the common words of our language, as er, al, il, ing, ight, etc. These are typical of the phonograms most frequently used in word building by the blending of sounds.

This blending is one of the most valuable of all exercises in teaching reading. Children learn to form words easily and rapidly by blending the phonograms which are merely consonant sounds, as s and r, with sound syllables as ing, or ight. The pupils like this synthetic work because it seems such a simple process, especially if the words formed are words full of meaning to them. Such a pleasant introduction to the work spurs on the learners and the teacher can lead them to attempt sentence formation by combining the words thus formed into expressions of some familiar idea or activity. With words of familiar meaning for use in this exercise, the teacher has eliminated the most serious objection to phonetic teaching, namely, that words containing similar sounds were often joined together in sentences frequently puerile and nonsensical. Sense was frequently sacrificed to sound and words were taught and drilled upon merely because of their similarity in sound to words previously known. In concluding this description of the phonetic method we may accept its ideal realization in this brief statement. Present the

simplest phonograms, the sounds of the consonants, first—follow with simple vowel sounds, combinations of such letters as r, u, l, d, t—blend these two elements into wholes that represent objects or ideas to the child, and build up sentences that have meaning and thought.

In order that the work should produce effective results the teacher must vigilantly and ceaselessly guard against careless enunciation. Sometimes this faulty enunciation is the result, not of carelessness, but of the child's foreign tongue or his imperfect vocal or auditory organs. When the cause is physical, vocal exercises and drills will be of great assistance to the teacher. When the cause is a foreign home environment, or the careless *patois* or slang of the street, the uniform presentation of correct models by the teacher, side by side with systematic and frequent phonic drills and exercises, are certain to assist in correcting the defects.

One of the serious objections to concert recitation in this work is the difficulty experienced in detecting mistakes in enunciation and articulation. Again such concert recitations often result in unnaturalness or monotony of expression, because the entire class swings along with little or none of the thought of content that is the *sine qua non* of correct expression.

Teachers frequently make effective use of the drills on type words and sentences apart from and preceding the reading lesson. Occasionally pupils are trained to whisper the words of the lesson in a semi-silent reading before the formal exercise. Such whispering, if it does not disturb the class, affords an opportunity for the motor activity of the child during his studying.

Miss Arnold suggests the following plan for studying the reading lesson. Individual pupils whisper sentences to the teacher. These sentences are written on the board and other pupils are called upon to read them. Of course the words

in such sentences must be somewhat familiar to the class or the lesson would be merely a guessing exercise.

In all formal readers for primary grades illustration is a very important feature, and the study of the illustrations with oral exercises in sentence formation thereon are productive of good results. Efficient teachers make the fullest use of the illustrations given in the readers. They do not depend entirely upon the book illustrations, but make collections of pictures interesting to child life and use them as an inspiration for oral and written compositions. This is one of the many features of oral language work which should precede the regular reading lesson. All such oral exercises tend to familiarize pupils with the words which a child uses in his every-day conversation, or which are found in his reading lessons. With foreign children these exercises are specially useful, and a good teacher will always avoid harsh personal criticisms for mistakes in the informal oral English exercises. The teacher should make a special effort to encourage the foreigners in her class, or those who are naturally timid. In this way she will inspire pupils to attempt expression of their thoughts and ideas, and gradually give them the confidence necessary for further effort.

During such oral exercises the teacher should make the fullest use of sentences illustrating the use of words. This is a period of school life when the use of objects in the earliest grades impresses the associations of idea with word, first oral and later printed or written.

The oral language work is not only a necessity for first year classes but all through the grades it should be a preparation for the reading lesson, and the teacher who neglects the informal explanations and the conversation on the content of the lesson is neglecting a very effective aid to the proper appreciation of the reading. Any teacher who attempts the reading of the Lady of the Lake, Evangeline, one of Shakespeare's plays, or

a speech of Webster, without preparatory explanation or conversation is neglecting one of the surest means of obtaining successful results. In the first three years all this preparation is a decided aid in the thought development, which is an essential purpose of the reading lesson. In the study of each sentence it arouses interest because the child knows the content of her reading, and it makes the reproduction of the story in the child's own language a comparatively simple process.

This question of reproduction is one of the most troublesome features of the work in reading. Teachers often find that the class will read a lesson fluently, will answer individual questions quite readily, but will fail utterly when asked to reproduce the simple story in language not absolutely the same as the lesson. This failure is specially marked when the children are asked to tell the story to some visitor, or to the principal of the school, and the teacher occasionally explains the failure by stating that the children are too bashful or that they are frightened. Such explanation may account for some hesitation, but it cannot account for the failure of an entire class of pupils in reproducing the story.

I believe that if the children have really understood the content during the reading they will readily reproduce the story, no matter who happens to be in the room. The point is to give little ones the necessary confidence in their ability to tell what they know, and a very simple device for fostering such confidence is the following: Occasionally, at the conclusion of the reading lesson, let the teacher send to a neighboring classroom for one or two pupils. Then let the teacher ask the pupils who have just read the lesson to tell to the visiting pupils the story that they have just read. I have found that children appreciated, in such case, that they are telling something to other children, and thus are more likely to feel confident of their ability to express themselves and more ambitious to repeat the story that they have just enjoyed.

The teacher who has developed the lesson by frequent and apt questioning need not worry about the success of her pupils' attempts to reproduce the story. If the content of the lesson is not beyond the children's powers of assimilation, and the teachers' preparation and presentation of the lesson have been conducted according to good method, the pupils will respond readily to requests for free reproduction of the story. The teacher's question is the life of the lesson, and the best preparation for future reproduction. Even in the first year the questioning devices recommended by Miss Laing are certain to have effective results. She would have the pupils ask questions on the lesson, questions which would be answered by the teacher in sentences on the blackboard. Then reversing the process, the teacher would write questions on the board and the children would answer orally. If the story is illustrated the teacher should begin the reading lesson by questioning on the picture so as to arouse the pupils' interest in the story, to quicken their thinking powers, and to give them confidence in their ability to express their thoughts by the picture.

All this work is but practical exemplification of that excellent definition of a teacher's aim, which Dr. Rowe gives in his "Habit Formation"—"The organization of the child's experience, whether that experience is made up largely of sense impressions, of thought elaborations, or of muscular movement." Unfortunately, instead of organizing the child's experience, the teacher who gives a reading lesson without careful preparation, if she questions at all, questions in a manner that results in haphazard, unsystematic, and disorganized responses.

Where the teacher's work of preparation has been a real success the lesson may be assimilated and reproduced even without an oral reading by the pupils. I have observed teachers present the meaning and use of new words for a reading lesson, teach the correct pronunciation and develop the

story and thought of the lesson, and then, instead of an oral reading, allow the pupils time for a silent reading of the lesson. This silent reading completed, the order was given to close books, and I have listened to the pupils as they told the story in their own language with an interest that proved conclusively that they had appreciated and assimilated the thoughts of the author.

It is well to impress the value of silent reading and the appreciation of content as a necessary aid to expressive oral reading. By such oral reading, or by the free lively reproduction of the story, the teacher can judge whether the thought has been intelligently grasped, and pupils are certain to find their greatest pleasurable experience in telling to others the thoughts and experiences they have grasped from their reading.

If the best use is made of the silent reading as an efficient aid to oral reading the reading period becomes as it should be, one of the most pleasant features of the school work. We all know that instead of being a time of pleasure the reading period becomes one of the most wearisome periods of the day, whenever the teacher insists on calling on all the poor readers in order that they may labor through their sentences or paragraphs while the other pupils are forced to remain idle listeners.

With the poor readers of the class there is excellent opportunity for group teaching, and the teacher can through this device attain much more than she can by taking these pupils with the entire class. Let them listen attentively while the good readers recite, but do not call upon them to read when such recitation merely affords opportunities for correcting mistake after mistake, to the utter weariness of the good readers. If the poor readers are taken alone, the teacher may be able gradually to give them confidence and strength.

Even in the highest grades, as Superintendent Hughes

points out, the silent reading can be utilized to train pupils to think. The teacher can write from the text book of science, history, geography, or grammar, some paragraph containing a thought or idea which pupils cannot grasp easily. Having written this paragraph on the board the pupils should be given time to read and assimilate, and then, erasing the paragraph, to reproduce the thought as they have grasped it. This is one of the simple devices for training children to think which could be practised much more frequently than it is. The pupil who knows that in his reading he is telling something to all the class, and not merely reciting for the approbation of his teacher, has attained success, and teachers frequently make excellent use of the device of having children face their classmates when they read. Under such circumstances the child is induced to make a special effort to read so that all the other pupils can understand what he is reading. It is occasionally a good plan to have the other pupils look up from their books at the reader, because in this way he is spurred to read understandingly, knowing that his fellow pupils are following him, not in their readers, but through his recitation.

As Professor Huey states, in such reading even if a pupil occasionally substitutes words that are not in the text, but words that express equally well the content, the reading is not a failure. On the contrary, it is occasionally a proof that the child has grasped the thought, and has sufficient command of a vocabulary to express that thought in the language of the book, supplemented with the words of his own vocabulary.

In concluding this outline of methods in teaching children to read, I desire to impress the fact that when the foundation is well laid, the pupil is prepared for that kind of reading which will count most in his future education. The learned to like reading, to appreciate what he reads, can easily teacher is building for the future, and the child who has be led in higher grades to take up good literature as one of

the great pleasures of his life. Children never select inferior reading because they look for such class of literature, but merely because they know no better, and through every grade of the school course, from the lowest to the highest, the good teacher should bear this thought in mind in her reading lesson.

We are giving in the reading lesson a power to the boy or girl that will be with him for all time, that may grow into a stronger asset with each recurring year if well directed, but on the other hand may develop into a veritable Frankenstein if used to attain familiarity with the literature that perverts truth and justice, or that degrades the ideals of self-respect and moral training.

"This series of Readers will take first place in our Catholic schools."
—*Catholic School Journal.*

THE NEW CENTURY CATHOLIC READERS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLORS AND IN BLACK AND WHITE

Competent critics pronounce these the finest Readers published anywhere

	LIST PRICE	Net price if ordered direct from one of our houses in New York, Cincinnati, or Chicago.
THE FIRST READER,	$0.20	$0.16⅔
THE SECOND READER,	0.28	0.23⅓
THE THIRD READER,	0.38	0.31⅔
THE FOURTH READER,	0.50	0.41⅔
THE FIFTH READER	0.60	0.50

The New Century Catholic Readers are, it is confidently believed, the best and the most beautiful books for their purpose ever sent out by any publisher.

While no pains or expense have been spared to make these books inviting to the eye, their chief aim is *to teach the child to read.* To this end great care has been taken to provide lessons that are attractive and interesting, since it is universally admitted that the difficulty of learning is greatly lessened when once the interest of the child is assured.

Their *gradation* will commend itself to the experienced teacher.

Correspondence Respectfully Solicited

BENZIGER BROTHERS

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO.

JUN 26 1912

THE CATHOLIC

NATIONAL SERIES

OF READERS

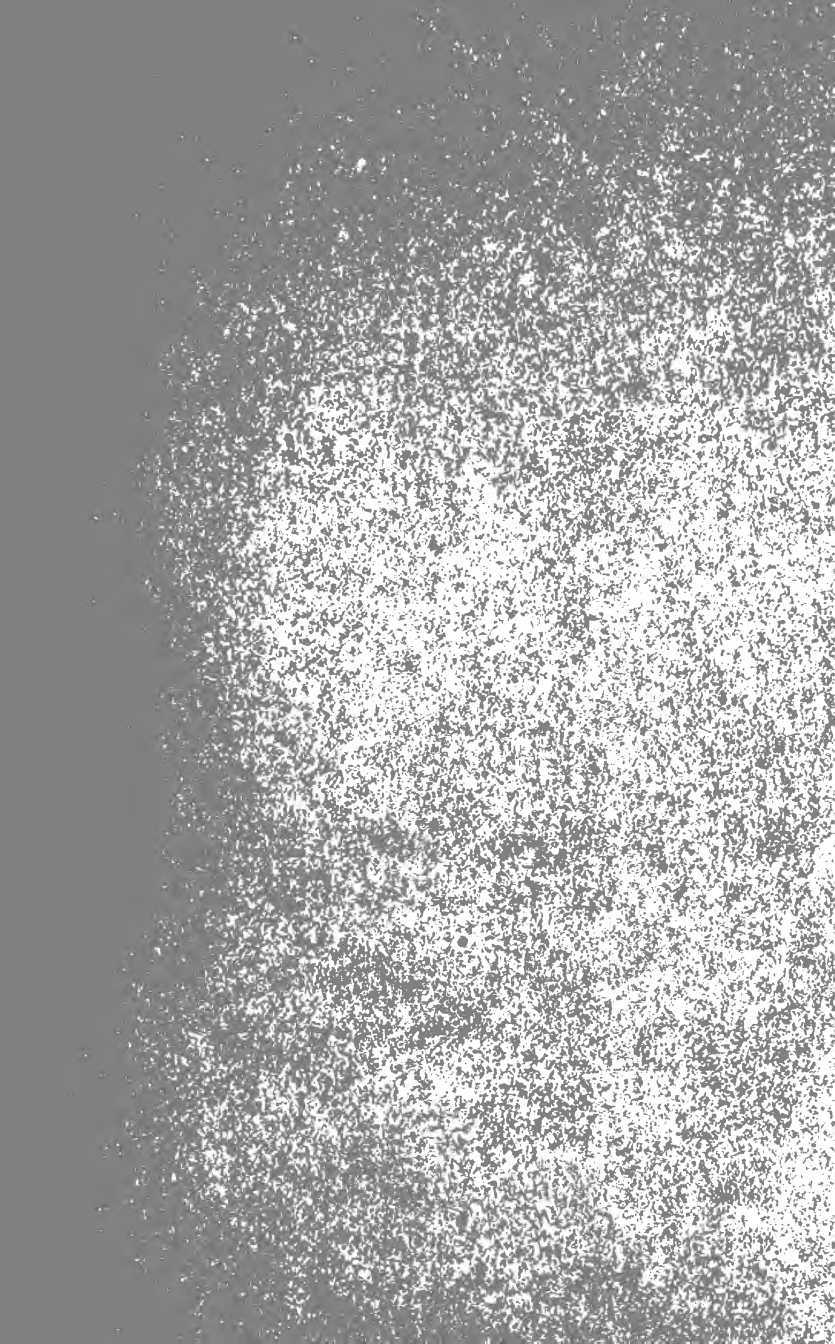
	LIST PRICE	NET PRICE *if ordered direct from one of our three houses*
NEW PRIMER, 32 pages, paper cover, - -	$0.06	$0.05
32 pages, cloth, inked, - - - - -	0.10	0.08⅓
NEW FIRST READER, 96 pages, cloth, inked, -	0.18	0.15
NEW SECOND READER, 168 pages, cloth, inked,	0.24	0.20
NEW THIRD READER, 256 pages, cloth, inked, -	0.30	0.25
NEW FOURTH READER, 288 pages, cloth, inked,	0.36	0.30
NEW FIFTH READER, 384 pages, cloth, inked -	0.54	0.45
SIXTH READER, 480 pages, cloth, inked, - -	0.72	0.60

The Catholic National Readers are thoroughly Catholic. Their Catholicity is not confined to a few religious lessons, but breathes forth from every page, and is taken in unconsciously by the pupil, these books being made only and expressly for Catholic schools, and for no other.

With the exception of the "New Century Catholic Readers," the Catholic National Series is the finest published, as it is also the cheapest.

BENZIGER BROTHERS

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 021 775 149 4